

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (part 3)

2/9/2019

What makes for a good church?

What makes for a bad church?

We each have our own ideas and opinions, don't we?

Our opinions have been shaped by our backgrounds,

Our personal experiences,

especially in the "formative years,"

which also may differ for each one of us.

1. So do you prefer Gregorian chants,

Great Songs of the Church, the Gaithers,

or Lauren Daigle?

2. Are you a fan of Tim Keller, Batsell Barrett Baxter,

Andy Stanley, or Rick Warren?

3. Do you like contemporary, or contemplative;

Tize, or traditional?

4. Do "good churches" use King James, NIV, Amplified,

the Message or the Living Bible?

5. Do "good churches" teach creationism

or intelligent design?

6. Like I said last week, do good churches teach

pre-millennialism and the earthly reign of Christ,

postmillennialism or amillennialism?

7. And what happens

if you don't have a clue what those terms mean,

but you love Jesus and want to serve him

with all your heart, soul, mind and strength?

Can we be a good church

and not have a position on everything?

Whose church is it supposed to be, anyway?

Whose church, indeed.

As far as I know,
 what I shared about the postal route in Asia Minor
 was true,
 except for the part about putting the little flag up
 for incoming mail versus up for outgoing mail.

But the book of Revelation is what is called a “circular”-
 It was written to all the churches,
 each with its own message,
 but with the other churches able to read
 what was said to the other 6 churches.
 There are clues that Ephesians and Colossians
 were also intended to be circulars.
 So what? (Yes, it actually DOES matter.)

The warnings and admonitions to one church
 would apply to similar conditions at the other churches.

And they would apply to us today,
 and to every other church around the world
 that encounters similar problems
 and spiritual conditions and temptations.

It's OK that we are reading someone else's mail.
 That was intended.

We just have to do our homework,
 and do our best to make good applications.

So we go from Ephesus,
 that had done some really good stuff,
 but had lost their first love...
 (and had needed to do... what?)

We go from Ephesus to Smyrna- 2nd stop on our route.

Rev. 2:8-11

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

**These are the words of him who is
the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.**

**⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—
yet you are rich!**

**I know the slander of those
who say they are Jews and are not,
but are a synagogue of Satan.**

**¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.
I tell you, the devil will put some of you
in prison to test you,
and you will suffer persecution for ten days.
Be faithful, even to the point of death,
and I will give you the crown of life.**

**¹¹ He who has an ear,
let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
He who overcomes will not be hurt at all
by the second death.**

**Based on what Jesus, the Lord of all Creation says-
Smyrna- good church or bad church?**

1. Is there any criticism or condemnation?

2. What are they commended for?

**v. 9 “I know your afflictions and your poverty-
yet you are rich!”**

**“I know the slander you’re having to deal with,
from those who claim to be the chosen people of God,
but clearly, they are not.**

3. What do they need to work on?

a. Don’t be afraid... of what?

What you are about to SUFFER.

Notice- He does NOT say they aren’t going to suffer.

The clear implication is that they WILL.

Nobody WANTS to suffer.
 Suffering is not fun. Suffering hurts.
 How bad is it going to be?
 I tell you, the devil will put some of you
 in prison to test you,
 and you will suffer persecution for ten days.
 Be faithful, even to the point of death,
 and I will give you the crown of life.

This is not just suffering.
 It is not just persecution, but execution.

If you are dead, what good is the “crown of life?”
 Kind of depends on what it DOES, right?

This letter opens with the following words-
 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:
 These are the words of him who is
 the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.
 It ends with

¹¹ He who has an ear,
 let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
 He who overcomes will not be hurt at all
 by the second death.

Death may be part of what you have to go through
 for my name’s sake.

But that’s only the 1st death.
 That is not the ultimately important death.

To the person who overcomes,
 “They will not be hurt at all by the SECOND death.”
 So there are TWO deaths...fascinating... who knew?

And one is temporary, and one is permanent...
 good to know, right?

For the “good church,”
 bad times have come in the past, and may come now,
 and Jesus prophesies them in the future for Smyrna.

That doesn’t make them “bad church.”
 It doesn’t mean they have messed up.
 Let’s look at the last church in the list, Laodicea.

We go from a church that receives only praise,
 to one who receives no praise at all,
 and what is interesting
 is to see the clash in value systems between them.

Rev. 3:14-17

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
 These are the words of the Amen,
 the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.
¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.
 I wish you were either one or the other!
¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—
 I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

(What are they doing that is SO repugnant
 that it makes Jesus about to throw up, vomit,
 spit or spew them out of his mouth?)

¹⁷ You say,
 ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’
 But you do not realize that you are wretched,
 pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Jesus knows the deep poverty of the church in Smyrna,
 yet He says they are rich.

Jesus knows the rich self-sufficiency
 of the church at Laodicea,
 and calls them pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

**“I am rich; I have acquired wealth; I don’t need a thing.
Look what I’VE accomplished. Yay, me.”**

**It is no coincidence that Jesus begins
the Sermon on the Mount with the words-
“Blessed are the impoverished in Spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matt. 5:3)**

**There is something uniquely repugnant to Jesus
when individuals or churches
claim a self-sufficiency that is in truth, a lie.**

**ALL that we have,
comes to us because of undeserved grace.**

- Our stuff,
- Our physical, emotional, intellectual abilities,
- Where we live,
- Our health and prosperity,
- Yes, including temporary freedom from persecution.
- And ESPECIALLY our favored status as God’s children.

**So what is the advice Jesus gives
to a self-sufficient (and self-absorbed) church?**

**¹⁸ I counsel you to buy FROM ME gold refined in the fire,
so you can become rich;
and buy from ME white clothes to wear,
so you can cover your shameful nakedness;
and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.**

**¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.
So be earnest, and repent.**

Be earnest. Be sincere...Take it seriously.

REPENT!

**²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.
 If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,
 I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.**

**This is not a “how to be saved” verse;
 it is written to Christians.**

**“Open your heart,” Jesus has to say to Christians.
 He wants to be a part of your life,
 but you have to open the door for Him.**

**He wants relationship,
 based on us recognizing the truth of things,
 that we needed God in the Garden of Eden,
 and we need Him no less now.**

- 1. HE is God, we are not.**
- 2. We cannot call our own shots, go our own way.**
- 3. None of us are self-made successes.**
- 4. Whatever we have, comes as blessings from Him.**
- 5. But God wants relationship with us,
 from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22.**

THAT is the truth of things... Can we be OK with that?

**²¹ To him who overcomes,
 I will give the right to sit WITH ME on my throne,
 just as I overcame and sat down with my Father
 on his throne.**

**²² He who has an ear,
 let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

... To ALL the churches, then and now.

- 1. Good churches that look to Him to be their all in all.**
- 2. Bad churches that are not looking to Him at all.**
- 3. Ugly churches that make Jesus want to throw up.**

If we are asking for Jesus to be our vision in 2020,
 what does Jesus see when he looks at the church,
 when he looks at OUR church?

Only, it has never been OUR church, has it?
 It has always been HIS church.
 He died for it, to cleanse it and make it holy.

1. When we think the church exists for US,
 2. When we think it is OUR church,
 to accommodate OUR preferences,
 3. When we want it to meet OUR needs,
 instead of being a hospital to meet the needs
 of the lost and hurting,
- I hate to say it, but we have to admit
 that we are "bad church," "ugly church."

That really, REALLY is unpleasant, isn't it?
 Imagine how God feels about it, and Jesus, His Son?
 I don't want to be that,
 and I'm sure you don't want to be that.

And so Jesus tells Bad churches, and Ugly churches,
 to REPENT.

And to Good churches he tells them to OVERCOME,
 all the way to the end,
 because that is when the really good stuff comes,
 all the promises.

(2:11) He who overcomes will not be hurt at all
 by the second death.

^{3:21} To those who overcome,
 I will give the right to sit WITH ME on my throne,
 just as I overcame and sat down with my Father
 on his throne.

And for eternity THAT'S where we really want to be, AMEN?